

A Rupee Earned

An Armenian Folktale

By I. F. Bulatkin

Once upon a time, in a land to the north, there lived a blacksmith who had worked hard all his life to provide for the needs of his family. So diligently had he labored and so carefully had he saved that his wife and his children never knew want, and he even managed to put by a small store of wealth.

But unlike his father, the son of this industrious man was such a lazybones that in the whole wide world there was none to equal him. Although he was healthy and strong he did not know how to do anything but eat, drink, and sleep in the shade. In all the twenty years of his life he had not earned a single anna, and he never gave a thought to the fact that he was living on his father's bread.

Now the time came when the blacksmith grew old and no longer had the strength to raise a spark from his anvil. Finally the old man took to his bed and when he realized that death was near, he called his son to his side.

"I do not know why you are so lazy," the aged blacksmith lamented. "You cannot take after me, for I have been on friendly terms with work my whole life long. Little by little I acquired my household goods by toil and honest sweat. How can it be that a son of mine cannot earn even one rupee?"

"Well, to earn just a rupee is not such a magnificent thing," the youth replied.

"My son," said the father, "show me that you can earn one rupee and all that I own will be yours when I die. Yes, you must prove to me now that you can earn something by the labor of your hands; otherwise, when I am gone you will not receive a rusty horseshoe nail. That is my will."

Now the blacksmith's son wanted very much to come into this inheritance, but he was so lazy he hated to bestir himself to perform the small task his father required. Besides, he did not know how. What a cruel thing, to have to earn a whole rupee when he had never earned a single anna since the day he was born! But a paternal word is a stone mountain, and as a stone mountain is not removed, a paternal word is not changed. His father had spoken.

The doting mother of this good-for-nothing youth could not bear to see him suffer. When she found a convenient moment, she said to him:

"Listen, little son, here is a rupee for you. Go and amuse yourself today; but when you come home in the evening, pretend you are returning from work and tell your father that you have earned the money."

The youth was so lazy he did not want to bother himself even this much, but he knew that something had to be done. So he took his mother's rupee, and with a bit of bread and cheese and a leather bag of wine he went off into the mountains. All day long he ate and drank and counted the birds in the sky. Then at nightfall he returned home and gave his father the rupee, saying:

“Here, father, take it. It wasn’t easy for me to earn this rupee. I cannot straighten my back, I worked so hard.”

The father took the coin, looked at it from both sides, and tossed it from palm to palm. Then he threw it into the fire

“No,” he said, “you did not earn that rupee.”

With a shrug of his shoulders the son replied: “Well, you don’t have to believe me.” And he went off to bed.

The next day the worried mother gave her son a second rupee, but this time she instructed him:

“Sleep all day if you wish, little son, but before you come home in the evening, run one mile. You will perspire, you will be tired, and then your father will believe that you have been at work, and that you did his bidding and earned the money by your labor.”

The lazybones cared for his legs, but cared still more to inherit his father’s fortune. So he took his mother’s rupee, and with food and drink he set out for the mountains as before. From dawn to dusk he ate and drank and warmed himself in the sun, but when it came time to go home he ran a mile, and then for good measure he ran another.

And when he arrived at the threshold he was so tired he could hardly draw a breath. Perspiration poured from him in streams. He toppled onto a bench and held out the rupee.

“It surely was hard for me to earn this rupee!” he gasped. “I worked like an ox in the livelong day. I am falling over my feet with fatigue.”

The father took the coin from his son, turned it over again and again in his hand, then threw it into the fire.

“No,” he said, “you are deceiving me, my son. This rupee was given to you. It was useless for you to run from the mountains.”

What could the lazy youth say? “You don’t wish to believe me,” he shrugged, smiling. “To be sure, it’s not true.” And forthwith he lay down by the fire and went to sleep.

The good-for-nothing youth dreamed sweet dreams, but sleep did not come to his dear mother. She realized now that in deceiving her husband they only lost their hard-earned money; and she also knew that all this brought no profit to her son.

So the next day she instructed differently:

“Come now, little son. If you want to inherit your father’s property, you must take yourself off and really go to work. If you only earn one or two annas a day, in a week you can make a whole rupee.”

It seemed there was nothing else to do; the time had come to obey. The lazybones worked for a whole week. He carried something for one man; he helped with something for another. One man gave him one anna; another gave him two. Bit by bit he accumulated a whole rupee.

Then he went to his father and poured a handful of coins before him. Again the old man turned over the money, weighed it in his hand, and held some pieces up to the light. Then he said:

“No, my son. You have deceived me again. You did not earn this money.” And he seized all the coins and threw them into the fire like so much rubbish.

But this time the son was in a frenzy. He hurled himself into the fireplace, separated the burning coals with his bare hands, and snatched the money out of the very fire itself. “Why did you do that?” he cried. “I haven’t straightened up my back for a whole week and you want to burn my money in the fire!”

The father looked at his son and said:

“Now I believe that you earned this rupee yourself. Someone else’s money you do not care about – that is cheap. But the money you earn by your own labor – ah, that you make a big fuss over! So it is my son. Remember my words: As long as you work, you will have money and contentment, and all things will be yours. But if you will not work, another person’s money cannot help you, for someone else’s rupee is not worth one anna.”

Then the father willed all his property to his son and went to the land from which no man ever returns.

Reference:

Bulatkin, I. F., “A Rupee Earned.” *Global Reading Safari*. Ed. James Barry. Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1994. 206-209.